

Excerpt from *A Passion for Wildlife: The History of the Canadian Wildlife Service*
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In 1991 the Minister of the Environment announced a national wildlife strategy and an interim policy respecting application of the **Migratory Birds Convention** Act to closed-season hunting and egg gathering by Aboriginal people.³⁵ The statement marked the resumption of efforts to negotiate amendments to the **Migratory Birds Convention** (see also Chapter 2).

Having met with disappointment on this issue a decade earlier, neither Canada nor the United States was inclined to take chances this time. From 1992 to 1995, a painstaking process of consultation took place. Involving a wide variety of federal, provincial, and state agencies, Native groups, and nongovernment environmental advocacy organizations, it was led by Greg Thompson, Director of the **Migratory Birds Branch**, and overseen by Director General David Brackett.

Negotiations between the United States and Canada were successfully completed on 27 April 1995 at Parksville, British Columbia. There, a protocol to amend the **Migratory Birds Convention** was initialled by the chief negotiators for both countries. David Brackett, who had played a crucial role throughout the long process, including the **negotiations**, was jubilant. The document outlined several key amendments. It accommodated the traditional harvest of **migratory** birds by Aboriginal peoples in northern regions. It permitted qualified residents of northern Canada to take **migratory** game and nongame birds as part of a subsistence lifestyle. It allowed for an early fall hunting season for residents of Yukon and the Northwest Territories. It authorized Canada to regulate the harvest of murres in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It increased the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the study and management of **migratory bird** populations.³⁶

The importance of the amendments was more far-reaching than might be suggested by these specific modifications. Failure to bring the treaty into conformity with current practices and laws could have led to its abrogation, ending eighty years of international cooperation between Canada and the United States in the field of wildlife conservation and protection. Historically, the status of the **Migratory Birds Convention** as an international agreement has been offered as a fundamental justification for the federal government's involvement in the management of **migratory** birds. It might have been argued that the demise of the **convention** would erode the legal basis of this arrangement, allowing the entire responsibility for the protection of **migratory** birds to revert to the provinces.

Fortunately, this hypothesis was not put to the test. In anticipation of agreement on the amending protocol, Parliament amended Canada's **Migratory Birds Convention** Act in May 1994. With the legislative framework already in place, the federal Cabinet was able to grant rapid approval of the Parksville protocol. The protocol was formally signed on 14 December 1995 by the Honourable Sheila Copps, Minister of the Environment, on behalf of Canada, and by Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior, on behalf of the United States. In Washington, President Clinton forwarded the agreement to the Senate on 20 August 1996, where it received approval on 23 October 1997.

A complementary step towards continental cooperation in wildlife management at this time was the development of a tripartite agreement for the conservation of **migratory** birds and their habitats in Mexico. Following the establishment of NAWMP (see Chapter 6), Tony Clarke and his counterpart, Frank Dunkle of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, visited Mexico to invite that country's participation. While the Mexican authorities were not prepared to join NAWMP at that point, they were ready for a less formal framework of collaboration. When David Brackett succeeded Clarke as Director General of CWS, he proposed that the long-standing Canada-USA and USA-Mexico wildlife committees be dissolved and replaced with one body representing all three countries. Steve Wendt, CWS scientific authority for NAWMP since 1989, was assigned the task of working with his counterparts in the other wildlife agencies to develop a functioning model. The result was the Canada-USA-Mexico Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystems Conservation and Management, which held its first official meeting in 1996. Subsequently, the three nations have initiated the North American **Bird** Conservation Initiative (NABCI). Founded on the presumption that birds are key indicators of overall environmental health, the coordinated continental program aims to develop and implement landscape-based conservation strategies for all birds.

Meanwhile, a rapid-fire series of other developments, both international and domestic, were reshaping the governance of wildlife in Canada. June 1992 saw CWS staff involved in providing background support services for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In December of that year, Canada signed the **Convention** on Biological Diversity. At about the same time, federal and provincial ministers responsible for parks, wildlife, and environment announced their determination to complete a national network of protected areas representing all the natural regions of Canada and to take steps to protect critical wildlife habitat.